

Dear Representatives

I writing you in support of HB 4518, 4594-4596. I am representing Richard Simmons, 189585.

I woul like to tell a little of my back ground, in hopes, you will understand how I came to support a second chance for Juveniles sentenced to life without parole.

I grew up with a step-father that was an assistant prosecuting attorney in Genesee County back in the 70's. My mother ran the public defenders office at the time. There were often lawyers and judges at our home. I was raised with a strong sense of justice for people who break laws and commit crimes.

I graduated from college with a BS in Criminal Justice. I have worked five years in the MDOC and 5 years in the Department of Human Services. Now I own and operate a sucessful small business. When I first started working in corrections, I viewed all prisoners as people that deserve the very least in society. They broke the law, now they need to pay for their crimes. I still believe people and juvenile need to pay for the crimes they commit.

While working there I did see how the State of Michigan just warehouses human beings. I would read prisoner's files and see grave inconsistencies between crimes and punishments. I would read of one very heinous crime and the felon received 20-30 from one county. Another crime would be less severe and they would receive life for felony murder. There are many inconsistencies in sentencing for the same crime throughout the state. It appeared sentencing depended on where you lived or if it was an election year. It amazed me how many juvenile offenders were getting life without parole for felony murder, when adults who committed the same or worse crime were eligible for parole in time. I also spent a lot of time working with prisoners. I saw many prisoners that have managed to overcome their past and work hard to better themselves. I know there are some prisoners who should never be released.

While working in foster care for the Department of Human Services. I worked first hand with abused and neglected children. I witnessed the severe emotional problems these juveniles faced to overcome. During the course of one Juvenile transportation, I was physically assaulted by a 15 year foster child in the back seat of the vehicle. I worked with this young man for year and saw his anger towards they system and life increase. He was constantly being moved from one secure location to another. He wasn't mad at me, he just didn't know how to express all the hurt and anger being built up. This is a prime example of how abused juveniles are not completely in control of their emotions or actions. Yes, I forgive and pray he doesn't end up in the Correctional system. He is one of many I saw going from one State system to another. This young man deserves better, he should be able to have a second chance at life.

House Bills 4518, 4594, 4595, and 4596 are not setting juvenile offenders free with no punishment for the crime they committed. These bills are giving these juveniles an opportunity to see the parole board and to show they are no longer a danger to society. There are too many men and women that have

paid for their crimes with 15 – 35 years of incarceration behind them. These people deserve a second chance at life. I ask you to please trust your Parole board in determining if these men and women are not a danger to society.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

  
Theresa Villarreal



Richard, far right, at 15



Richard at 39

### **Written Testimony of Richard Allen Simmons # 189585**

**I was arrested in 1986 for the murder of Geraldine Grams. At the time of my arrest, I was sixteen years old. I was a sophomore at Pine River High School in Leroy, Michigan.**

**Along with my younger brother Lonnie, I was raised by my maternal grandparents, Robert and Helen Wilson. My parents were unable to care for me and my brother due to drug and alcohol problems.**

**My life was good during the period I lived with my grandparents. I did well in school, participated in sports and spent many days either hunting or fishing with my brother, Lonnie.**

**In 1984, my grandmother became very ill and was hospitalized. She passed away on my grandfather's birthday in 1985. This was devastating period for all of us. My grandmother was the glue that held our family together.**

**Shortly after my grandmother's death, I slipped into a sea of hopelessness. I turned to drugs and alcohol to help ease the pain of my loss. As I looked back on that period of my life, I now realize it was the beginning of the end for me.**

**I am not using the loss of my grandmother or my abuse of drugs and alcohol as an excuse for my actions. I have only myself to blame for my actions that night. When I reflect back to my youth I can see where I took the wrong turn in my life.**

**The court appointed a psychiatrist at my Waiver of Jurisdiction hearing. The psychiatrist testified at my hearing that I was a boy with a strong conscience. If I had been 15 he would not have recommended that I be tried as an adult. Even with me being 16, he still had serious problems with me being tried as an adult. The Probate Court facing a**

still had serious problems with me being tried as an adult. The Probate Court facing a difficult decision waived me to stand trial as an adult. I was subsequently tried, convicted, and sentenced as an adult to Life without Parole.

I will remember my first day in prison for the rest of my life. It felt as if I were in a dream. I learned very quickly that it wasn't a dream, but a never ending nightmare. I spent several weeks in quarantine before I was transferred to the Michigan Reformatory, also known as Gladiator School.

My first day there I learned why MR was called Gladiator School. I watched a prisoner stab another with a knife so large that it went into his neck and came out of his armpit. The prisoner was dead before he hit the ground. This would be the first of many stabbings, rapes, and robberies that I would witness.

My story could've very well ended there with me becoming another angry, disillusioned, abandoned child of society. However, through the grace of the Creator, I chose another path. I chose the path of rehabilitation. This is not to say that I haven't gotten into trouble during my incarceration, because I did. I accept full responsibility for my early misconducts. I am proud to say I have been free of misconducts for over 13 years.

My rehabilitation accomplishments include: getting a G.E.D., scoring in the top 10%; attending two semesters of college, maintaining a 3.5 g.p.a.; completing several vocational trades, including several in the Horticultural field; completing Alcohol, Narcotics, and Emotions Anonymous; completed Independent study course in Drivers Refresher, Small Business Operation, and Financial Survival. I have also developed good work ethics.

Upon my release, I will marry my fiancée, Theresa Villarreal. Theresa is an amazing woman who has taught me the true meaning of being a man. She owns a successful business in which I will be able to obtain employment. She lives on 20 acres in Fremont, Michigan which will allow me a place for a successful transition into the community. These opportunities will allow me to become a productive member of society.

To ensure my success, I will attend outpatient therapy with Theresa. We both realize that I will need help in adjusting to the changes of society. I will also try to work with the Native American community to break the vicious and devastating cycle of alcohol and substance abuse. I will have the support of my brother and his family. As well, I will have the support of my friends, Rev. Robert and Sally Kahly.

In closing, I will never forget the devastating impact that I had on Ms. Gram's family, my family and friends. I will always carry this burden with me forever. I now only ask for the opportunity for a second chance of being a productive member of society.